

VZCZCXYZ0000
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHLP #2569 3462030
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 112030Z DEC 08
FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9480
INFO RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUMIAAA/USCINCSO MIAMI FL
RHMFIUU/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 1543
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS LA PAZ 002569

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [EAID](#) [BL](#)

SUBJECT: BOLIVIA: EVO ATTACKS PRESS FOR CORRUPTION COVERAGE

¶1. As more evidence is made public about Presidency Minister Quintana's alleged deal to allow contraband to be smuggled out of the country in return for political support, many groups (including allies of the ruling Movement Toward Socialism party) are calling for Quintana's resignation. Congress has asked Quintana to testify on the case. President Evo Morales has publicly defended his most powerful minister, and on December 10 lashed out at the media for their reporting on the case.

¶2. While acknowledging that he knew of Quintana's meetings with the smugglers, Morales defended Quintana, saying his only crime is "investigating USAID." Morales then publicly harassed a reporter who had published a story on the contraband case, calling for the reporter to stand next to him, demanding evidence, and then saying, "We have this class of newspapers and of journalists who lie and lie." In response to the widespread criticism that followed his actions, Morales announced that he would not apologize to the reporter until the reporter's paper apologized to Morales. "If they can't prove it, the newspaper should apologize to Evo," Morales declared, adding, "I am always humiliated by reporters...they tell me there's no freedom of expression (but) if there were no freedom of expression there wouldn't have been that article" (the article that prompted Morales' aggression toward the reporter).

¶3. During a celebration to mark the anniversary of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, Vice Minister Sacha Llorenti also threatened a reporter who asked about Morales' earlier outburst. Refusing to comment on the President's actions, Llorenti asked the reporter where she worked and then told her that he would be speaking with her boss. In response to questions about the events, presidential spokesman Ivan Canelas said, "If one reviews carefully what the President said, there was no humiliation."

¶4. Opposition politicians have accused Morales of covering up corruption, and Senator Oscar Ortiz (opposition party PODEMOS) described Presidency Minister Quintana as having "the power and influence of Montesinos" (former intelligence chief to ex-president Fujimori of Peru.) Press organizations have rallied to protest the public humiliation of their colleagues, and most newspapers have run editorials condemning the President's actions. An editorial in El Deber suggested that "something bad is happening at the palace" and that Morales is "losing his mind." La Prensa's editorial suggested that the reporter humiliated by Morales represents every Bolivian who has been humiliated by the President: "Never in the history of this country have we seen a leader elected by popular vote who has poured so much hatred and contempt over citizens, institutions, and authorities...the impotence on (the reporter's) face is the same as that felt by the businessman accused by the President of exploiting

people, or the magistrate accused of bad practice, or the public official stigmatized as corrupt, or the opposition member described as a terrorist..."--a strong editorial from a newspaper that has historically reported favorably on the government.

URS